

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Plan of Operations Modification David Kukowski
AKFF091219(3809) & AKFF092163(3715)

DOI-BLM-AK-F020-2014-0004-EA

Located in:

Eastern Interior Field Office
Chicken, Alaska

Prepared by:

U. S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Eastern Interior Field Office
1150 University Ave.
Fairbanks, Alaska 99709-3844

1. Introduction

1.1. BLM Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose for action is to determine whether or not the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) should modify Mr. David Kukowski's Plan of Operation to allow mining equipment weighing in excess of 1,500 pounds Gross Vehicle Weight Rating (GVWR) inside the Fortymile Wild and Scenic River Corridor along the established trail that is his authorized access. The equipment will be used for reclamation and cleanup activities on federal mining claims on Ingle creek that were deemed abandoned and void (AV'd). The Proposed Action is needed to reduce the impacts associated with structures, mining equipment and related materials being left unattended on BLM-managed land. Resource damage is likely to occur without timely action. The BLM believes this action will facilitate timely reclamation and cleanup.

1.2. BLM Decision to be Made

The BLM will make a decision whether or not to modify David Kukowski's Plan of Operation to authorize an overland move of equipment in excess of 1,500 pounds GVWR on an existing trail, identified as his access in his current Plan of Operations across BLM lands. The BLM will also determine the mitigation measures necessary to prevent undue and unnecessary degradation of the resources and to protect the natural and other values of such lands.

1.3. Scoping and Issues

1.3.1. Internal Scoping

Internal scoping involved the Eastern Interior Field Office Interdisciplinary Team. The Valued Environmental Components (VEC) matrix was used to identify issues for analysis. The following components were evaluated: access/travel management; air quality; areas of critical environmental concern; cultural resources; environmental justice; essential fish habitat; farm lands; fire management; floodplains; hydrology; invasive, nonnative species; mineral resources; Native American religious concerns; paleontology; recreation; socioeconomic; soils; subsistence; threatened or endangered species; travel management; vegetative resources; visual resources; wastes, hazardous or solid; water quality, surface or ground; wetlands/riparian zones; wild and scenic rivers; wilderness characteristics; aquatic wildlife; and terrestrial wildlife. Of the components evaluated, the following components were identified for analysis: access/travel management and hazmat. See Section 4, Environmental Effects, for analysis of impacts identified and mitigation measures proposed. The remaining components were evaluated by the interdisciplinary team and found to have negligible or no potential impacts resulting from the action as it is proposed. In accordance with 40 CFR 1500.1 (b), those components that were determined to have negligible or no impacts associated with the proposed action are not being

carried forward for analysis in this document.

1.3.2. External Scoping

The proposed action is not likely to cause any public concern or controversy given the established use of this trail by a variety of users; therefore, no external scoping was conducted beyond posting on the BLM NEPA Register and notifying the State of Alaska, Department of Natural Resources (DNR) that a right-of-way grant application had been received by the BLM.

2. Location, Land Status and Conformance with Land Use Plans

2.1. Location

The proposed action will occur approximately 2 miles west/southwest of Chicken, Alaska within Sections 26 and 34-36 Township 27 North, Range 17 East, Copper River Meridian.

2.2. Land Status

The subject lands are currently included in the Fortymile Wild and Scenic River Corridor and are under BLM's management jurisdiction.

2.3. Conformance with Land Use Plans

The proposed action is located within an area that is covered by the Fortymile River Management Plan, approved 10/11/1983, and the Fortymile Management Framework Plan (MFP), approved 9/8/1980. The Fortymile River Management Plan, Management Action 1.5 states that off-road vehicle (ORV) use, other than vehicles of less than 1500 pounds Gross Vehicle Weight (GVW), will be prohibited without a permit or approved plan of operations.

3. Proposed Action and Alternatives

3.1. Proposed Action

Mr. Kukowski proposes to use mining equipment that exceeds the 1,500 pound GVWR limit within the Fortymile Wild and Scenic corridor for the purpose of cleaning up and removing solid waste from his AV'd mining claims on Ingle Creek. The only practical access to the mining claim is the existing Chicken Ridge Trail located just to the north of Mosquito Fork Wayside at approximate mile marker 64 of the Taylor Highway, approximately 1.5 miles west of the town of Chicken. The trail traverses the Fortymile Wild and Scenic River Corridor for approximately 0.2 miles at the junction with the Taylor Highway, then crosses state land, and reenters the corridor approximately 1.5 miles down trail. At the reentry point the trail will be used for approximately

0.4 more miles within the corridor until the claims are reached (Figure I. titled: Kukowski AV'd Claims). Chicken Ridge Trail is an established existing trail, up to 40 feet wide and would require no improvement before use (Figure 2 titled: Aerial Photo – Kukowski). The items to be removed are listed in the inventory attached to this document (see Inventory Ingle Creek-Kukowski-2011). The plan modification would approve year round access with Spring Avoidance Period of April 20 to May 20; and during periods of high precipitation, as needed and communicated with the applicant. The storage or staging of equipment, solid waste and other items is not authorized under this action.

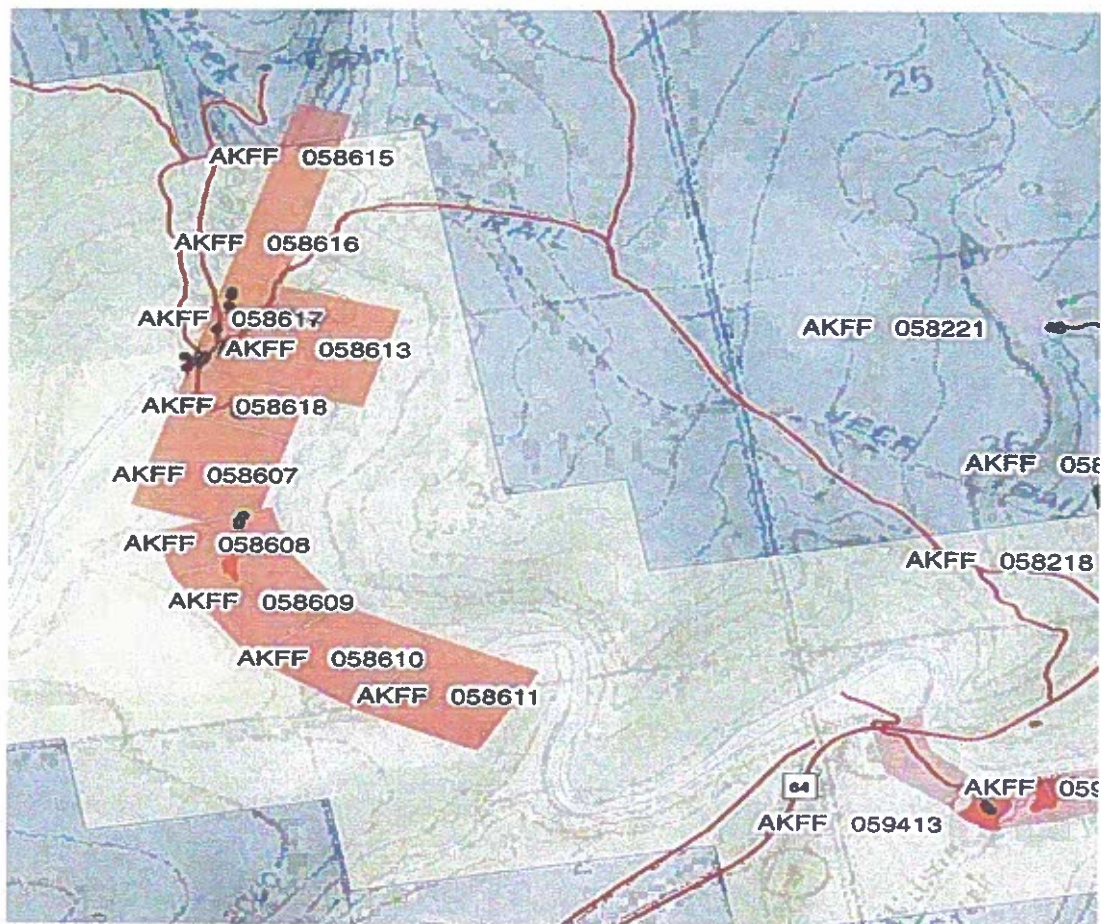


Figure 1. Kukowski AV'd Mining Claims Access

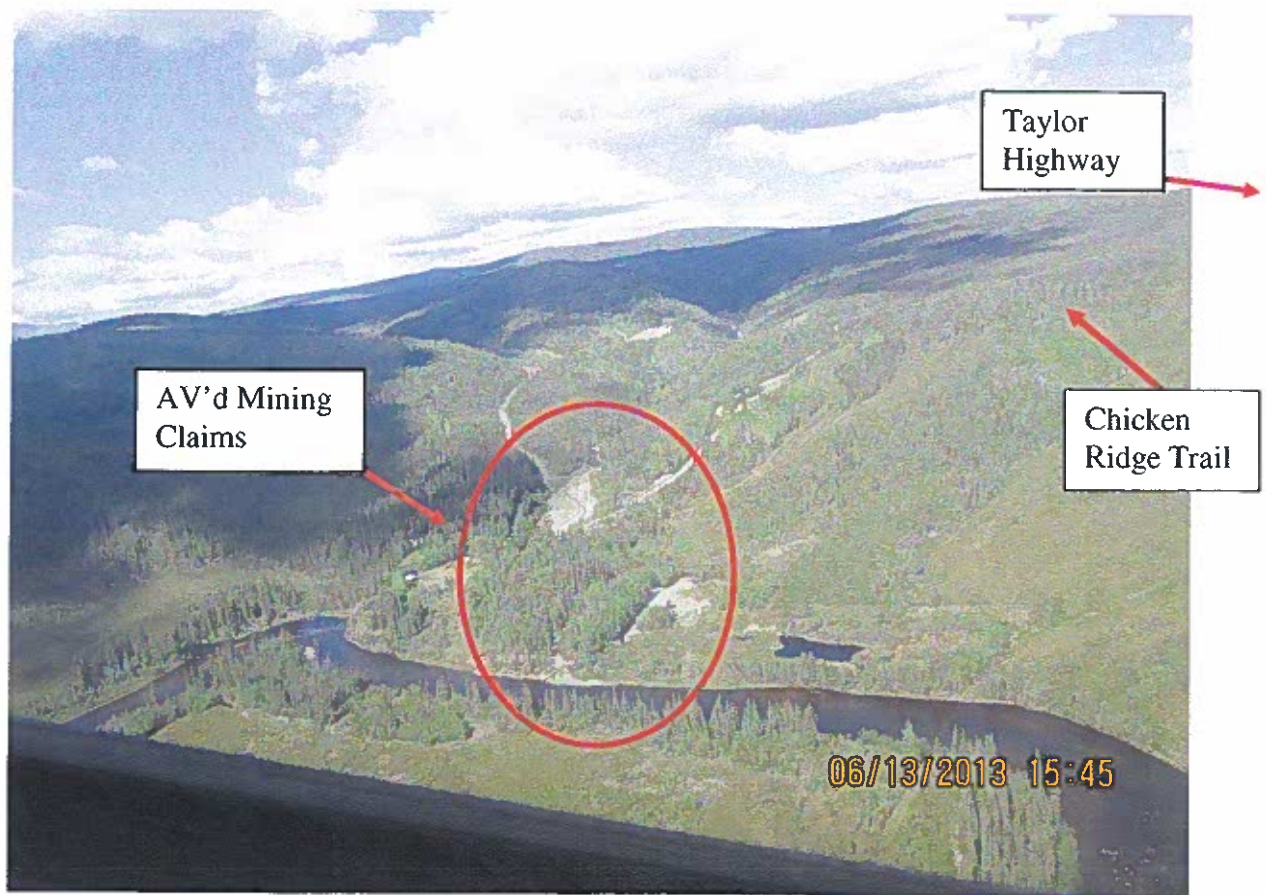


Figure 2. Aerial Photo – Kukowski

3.2. No Action Alternative

The no action alternative would restrict the overland move of equipment and removal of solid waste from the abandoned/void mining claims located on Ingle creek to the access that is currently allowed under the approved plan of operations. The movement of equipment weighing in excess of 1,500 lbs would be limited to times when frozen conditions on the trail and/ or river exist. Access to the Chicken Ridge Trail is not reliably maintained throughout the winter and other common hazards associated with winter travel in the interior of Alaska would present significant obstacles to the timely cleanup of the site. Winter only access would limit the necessary field work to a season for which practical access is not assured. Thus, the no action alternative does not meet the purpose and need.

4. Affected Environment

4.1. Proposed Action

4.1.1. Travel Management

The Chicken Ridge and Ingle Creek Trails are two of the more-well used motorized trails in the southern Fortymile area. The trails provide access to the many small mines throughout the larger area. They also offer an excellent opportunity for motorized hunters and trappers to venture off the highway system with their hunting and trapping endeavors. There is virtually no non-motorized use occurring on these trails. While mining activity occurs throughout the summer, nearly 90% of the recreational use occurs during hunting season; the last week of August/first two weeks of September and the trails may receive as many as 40 passes per day during this time. Winter use is generally by typical snowmachine type vehicle and averages two-three passes per week. The trails are in general very well established with many decades of use supporting mining and hunting activities.

4.1.2. Wastes

Mining in this area has occurred for over one hundred years. Over 20 recorded federal and state mining claims are accessed utilizing this trail. There are no recorded spills along the trail. There are no known areas of solid waste or human waste accumulation.

5. Environmental Effects, Mitigating Measures, and Cumulative Impacts

5.1. Proposed Action

5.1.1 Travel Management

5.1.1.3. Indirect and Direct Effects

Overall both the direct and indirect effects should not be significant with a slight temporary increase in use. Minor effects that may occur will likely occur during the early part of the summer season. During this time thaw depths are typically very shallow with thin highly saturated soil on top. This leads to significant hydraulic action in this layer which can result in displacement of soil and wave action that can widen the impact.

5.1.1.2. Cumulative Effects

Cumulative effects of this action could lead to a further increase in use of this trail and ultimately a closure if damages reach a certain threshold or increased maintenance needs if BLM chooses to do so.

5.1.1.3. Mitigation and Residual Effects

Mitigating measures include a Spring Avoidance Period of April 20 to May 20; and during periods of high precipitation in the area, as needed and communicated with the applicant. Avoidance of the known wet periods and conditions of high precipitation will reduce residual effects to a negligible level.

5.1.2 Wastes: Hazardous, Solid and Human

5.1.2.1. Indirect and Direct Effects

The proposed action has the potential to introduce petroleum contaminated soil along the trail. Solid waste that is not properly containerized has the potential for dispersal along the trail. The release of petroleum products has the potential to adversely impact soil, water, and vegetation. Solid waste accumulation along the trail could occur if loads are not properly secured. The accumulation of human waste could lead to the induction of disease bearing vectors.

5.1.2.2. Cumulative Effects

Long term cumulative effects of the proposed action are negligible, due to the fact that once the mining site is reclaimed the trail will no longer be utilized by this applicant. Past and present uses of the trail are anticipated to continue.

5.1.2.3. Mitigation and Residual Effects

The potential for spills can be mitigated through the adherence to proper safety procedures, inspection/monitoring and secondary containment. In the event of a spill from an accident, spill response measures (e.g., sorbents, neutralizers, secondary containment, and mechanical removal equipment) would minimize potential adverse impacts. Utilization of drip pans under equipment with leaks, or during refilling operations will minimize the potential for release of petroleum products to the environment. The applicant shall have absorbent material readily available during overland move to contain any leaks/spills. Minor equipment repair on site may be conducted to eliminate the release of hazardous material to the environment and shall be conducted over an impermeable liner. Pit privies are not authorized under the proposed action. Residuals effects of not implementing mitigating measures could lead to petroleum contaminated soil along the trail and unauthorized disposal of solid waste.

5.2. No Action Alternative

5.2.1. Travel Management

5.2.1.1. Indirect and Direct Effects

No impacts are anticipated for Travel Management. Current recreational uses and permitted activities will continue to occur.

5.2.1.2. Cumulative Effects

5.2.1.3. Mitigation and Residual Effects

No mitigation or Residual effects are anticipated.

5.2.2 Wastes: Hazardous, Solid and Human

5.2.2.1. Indirect and Direct Effects

The effects of the no action alternative restrict removal actions to less than 1,500 pounds GVWR. Solid waste and hazardous materials would remain on site without appropriate disposal in accordance with state and federal regulations.

5.2.2.2. Cumulative Effects

The long term cumulative effects of the no action alternative would leave a significant amount of solid waste, scrap metal and equipment on site, increasing the potential release of hazardous materials to the environment. The area then promotes the accumulation of additional equipment and solid waste by other miners and recreationalists that utilize the area.

5.2.2.3. Mitigation and Residual Effects

Current recreational uses and permitted activities would continue to occur along the trail. The potential for spills can be mitigated through the adherence to proper safety procedures, inspection/monitoring and secondary containment. In the event of a spill from an accident, spill response measures (e.g., sorbents, neutralizers, secondary containment, and mechanical removal equipment) would minimize potential adverse impacts. Utilization of drip pans under equipment with leaks, or during refilling operations will minimize the potential for release of petroleum products to the environment. Residuals effects of not implementing mitigating measures could lead to petroleum contaminated soil at the site, along the trail and unauthorized disposal of solid waste.

6. **Consultation and Preparers List**

6.1. List of Persons, Agencies and Organizations Consulted

Mr. Kukowski	Claimant/Operator	Execution of removal actions on Ingle Creek
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6.2 List of BLM Prepares

Tori Kohn	Geologist	Mining Compliance, EA Initiator
Ruth Gronquist	Wildlife Biologist	Wildlife, Subsistence, Invasive Nonnative Species, Vegetation, Threatened/Endangered Species
Robin Mills	Archeologist	Cultural Resources, Native American Religious Concerns
Ben Kennedy	Hydrologist	Air Quality, Floodplains, Water Quality, Wetlands/Riparian, Soils
Rebecca Hile	Physical Scientist	Wastes, Hazardous, Solid and Human

Michael Gibson	Assistant Field Manger	EA Reviewer
Jason Post	Fisheries Biologist	Fish Habitat
Collin Cogley	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Fire Management, Recreation, Travel Management

List of Figures and Attachments

Figure 1	Site Location Map
Figure 2	Aerial
Attachment 1	Assessment of Archeological, Historical, and Paleontological Resources (2 p)
Attachment 2	Compliance with ANILCA Section 810 Evaluation and Findings (1 p)

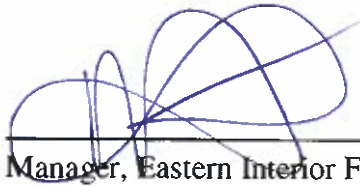

Preparer's Signature
Tom Beaucage
Realty Specialist, EIFO


Date

Finding of No Significant Impact

Kukowski Plan of Operations Modification- Access, FF091219 (3809) FF092163 (3715)

Finding of No Significant Impact: I have reviewed Environmental Assessment DOI-BLM-AK-F020-2014-0004-EA. Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts and considering the significance criteria in 40 CFR 1508.27, I have concluded that the proposed action will not have a significant effect on the human environment and an environmental impact statement is not required.



Manager, Eastern Interior Field Office

8/20/14
Date